

Connecticut School Indoor Environment Resource Team

Guidance for Schools Interested in Implementing EPA's Tools for Schools Program

Many school communities in Connecticut have identified poor indoor air quality in school facilities as an important public health issue. The EPA Tools for Schools (TfS) Program is a low-cost or no-cost, proactive strategy to address IAQ problems in schools through collaborative efforts involving school staff and parents. The program should be viewed not as a “quick fix” remedy, but rather as an ongoing, preventive strategy. The EPA has developed a “tool” kit of useful materials to assist schools in implementing the program.

Several agencies and organizations, including EPA, have identified the need to provide assistance to school systems in order to implement EPA Tools for Schools, and they have formed a consortium or resource team. A primary objective of this team is to provide training to TfS coordinators and committees.

School Responsibilities and Expectations

Once the school makes a commitment to implementing TfS, the Indoor Air Quality Management Plan in the TfS kit outlines several steps and activities that should be implemented on a periodic basis, at least once a year. Based on the experiences of other schools, the TfS program works best by having a team or committee carry out this work. The most successful committees have consisted of 5 to 6 persons: the school principal, the school nurse, a teacher, the head of custodial staff, a concerned parent, and possibly a school business official or town health official. The Resource Team encourages the local health director to be involved in the committee, as well. Ideally, the committee should meet roughly once a month throughout the school year, including training time.

The first step is for a school to appoint a coordinator, preferably the principal or vice principal—someone who has the ability to assemble and coordinate resources. That person should become familiar with the materials in the TfS kit, especially the coordinator's guide. At this point, it may be useful to meet with one of the resource team members, along with the local health director, to discuss the coordinator's role and begin to develop an implementation plan. The coordinator recruits the rest of the committee. Note: since the teachers' unions are part of the Resource Team, it is important to be in contact with the local affiliate when choosing the teacher representative. All team members should then review the TfS kit and view the *Taking Action* video, which will be provided with the kit.

Once the committee has been assembled, the first action item is to schedule training. Adequate training is perhaps the most important part of ensuring success for TfS, and therefore the school should offer strong support. The Resource Team has developed a two session training program; each session runs about 3 hours. After the first session has occurred, the committee should distribute the checklists (part of the kit) and begin communicating to the school community about TfS and the committee's work. After the second training, the committee will conduct a walk-through to investigate potential IAQ

problems. The committee will continue to meet and work to identify, prioritize and facilitate remediation of IAQ problems. The Resource Team will be available on a consulting basis for assistance.

Overall, the time commitment for school committee members will include approximately 2 hour monthly meetings. As this program should be ongoing, it is probably a good idea to have committee members rotate out on a yearly basis.

Agency Resources:

As noted above, several Connecticut agencies and organizations, along with EPA Region I have formed a Resource Team to assist schools. The committee includes public health professionals with IAQ expertise, industrial hygienists, and trainers. A two-part training program has been developed to train the committee to:

- collect and analyze potential IAQ problems using the kit;
- understand and evaluate ventilation systems;
- conduct site walk-throughs;
- develop and prioritize IAQ solutions; and
- communicate effectively with the school community.

After the two training sessions have been completed, a walk-through will be conducted by the committee. The resource team will provide initial and ongoing consulting with the committee to assist it in developing a plan to address problems identified by the checklists and walk-through.

Please contact Donielle Wilson, Connecticut Council on Occupational Safety & Health (860-549-1877); Kenny Foscue, Connecticut Department of Public Health (860-509-7742), or Angie Testa, American Lung Association of Connecticut (860 289-5401) to find out more and to begin the process of implementing the EPA Tools for Schools program.